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Special Feature

Donald Lehr

Engineers Week Global Outreach in 2005 Focuses on Engineers Without Borders

Knowing that engineers improve quality of life, *Engineers Without Borders – USA* (EWB-USA) was established in 2000 to mobilize volunteer engineers and engineering students to design and implement projects that bring sustainable, long-term benefits to impoverished communities around the globe. From a year-round water supply for a village in parched Burkina-Faso to bringing electricity and computer education to remote reaches of Nepal , the non-profit corporation has quietly grown to become one of the most significant goodwill efforts of the American engineering community.

Engineers Week 2005 co-chairs ASME (The American Society of Mechanical Engineers) and BP p.l.c., have made *Engineers Without Borders* a major focus of their activities. Engineers Week, for more than 50 years the profession's most visible public awareness and outreach program, has always highlighted the engineering community's volunteerism. For 2005, the support and expansion of the work of *Engineers Without Borders* underscores the new global thrust of EWeek and the organization's intention to take its message worldwide.

The Engineers Week partnership with EWB-USA calls on engineers from every discipline to help design and construct water, wastewater, sanitation, energy, and shelter systems in developing communities. These projects are initiated by and completed with contributions from the host community to ensure that locals can own and operate the systems without external assistance, long after the engineers have left. EWeek's co-chairs are encouraging engineering societies to organize multidisciplinary teams to adopt an ongoing EWB-USA project or help develop a new project of their own. In turn, the societies will recruit engineering students and young engineers to implement the projects.

Typical of the challenges EWB-USA volunteers face is the small village of Santisuk in the northern reaches of Thailand. Three decades ago, small bands of the once nomadic Lahu Shele tribe settled there after escaping civil unrest in nearby Myanmar, formerly known as Burma . Having survived for generations as hunters and gatherers, they soon hunted out all local game and then turned to slash and burn agriculture, eventually destroying much of the area's topsoil, along with the ability to grow crops. Further, improper resources management resulted in unstable water supplies for crops and drinking water tainted with bacteria, which caused widespread stomach ailments.

Engineering students from the University of New Hampshire in Durham, led by EWB-USA volunteer Dick Herring, a chemical engineer based in Colorado, adopted the project for *Engineers Without Borders* in 2003. First, they tackled the drinking water dilemma by installing filters and setting aside a leach field. Wastewater was separated from drinking water, bacteria was eliminated, and the stomach illness subsided. During the next monsoon season, however, rains overloaded the spring box that supplied drinking water, clogging it with debris and silt. Earlier this

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